



USING STUDY GROUPS TO INCREASE THE SUCCESS RATE OF STUDENTS

Research has shown that students who work together to acquire knowledge or a skill have greater academic achievement than students who work alone. As students complete their training and prepare for credentialing exams, study groups can provide them with an opportunity for cooperative learning that can increase their comprehension of coursework and raise test scores. But for study groups to be effective, instructors must promote their use and provide students with guidance and related support. This Bulletin will provide practical tips and strategies that instructors can use to increase participation in study groups and ensure their effectiveness. It will also offer a few tips that instructors can share with students to facilitate the success of these groups.



As students participate in your training program and prepare for credentialing exams, you'll want them to use every tool at their disposal for mastering the course content. Study groups can enrich a

student's learning experience by providing for the exchange of ideas, clarifying content and giving mutual support in the learning process. They can also help students build self-discipline and learn teamwork skills, characteristics that are valued in the workplace. But while some students immediately embrace the use of study groups and benefit from their involvement in them, others may not be comfortable with independent group study and may not avail themselves of this collaborative resource. This Bulletin will provide you with guidance that can maximize student participation in study groups and increase the effectiveness of their collaborative efforts. Also provided is a crib sheet with study group tips that you can share with your students.

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PROMOTING AND INCREASING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF STUDY GROUPS

❖ Emphasize the value of study groups -

Students are more likely to engage in study groups if instructors and counselors promote their value. This can include providing students with a list of benefits, sharing student feedback from existing study groups and asking graduates who have used study groups to provide testimonials. Another way to demonstrate their value is to offer evidence that study groups improve test scores by comparing the scores or grades of those working in study groups with those who aren't. It's also useful to provide ongoing encouragement for setting up the groups and reminders about their value throughout the duration of the course of instruction.

❖ Use collaborative learning in the classroom -

To help students feel more comfortable with group study, instructors can provide opportunities for collaborative learning in the classroom which allow them to see how small group dialogue can increase their understanding of course content. This can be done by forming ad-hoc groups tasked with summarizing the important points in a lecture or solving a problem related to the content covered in class. The jig-saw method, where each participant in a small group becomes an expert on a concept within a topic and instructs the rest of the group, can also be used for this purpose.

❖ **Help student organize groups** - While students should be encouraged to form their own groups, instructors can assist in this process by giving them a portion of classroom time to identify suitable partners. You may also want to consider asking students to make a commitment to group study by requesting that they register their groups and provide an incentive for registration such as extra points on their grade. To ensure that the groups get off to a good start, instructors can invite students to meet with them for their first session.



❖ **Provide groups with guidance** - To maximize the effectiveness of study groups, instructors should provide students with written guidance. This may include keeping groups small, perhaps no more than 5 to 6 people, identifying people with different strengths so that the group works well as a whole, setting up the ground rules before the first meeting, establishing when and where the group will meet and pledge to an hour-long session, committing to reading and reviewing the course content before the group meets, staying focused on what the groups want to accomplish and managing time carefully. To ensure that

the ground rules are followed, each group should have a team leader who organizes the sessions and makes sure everyone contributes, and a taskmaster who keeps the group focused.

❖ **Provide structure for study groups** - Instructors can increase the effectiveness of groups by providing students with structured tasks. These may include answering a series of questions related to a topic, reviewing their classroom notes and identifying what they think will appear on the next test, writing a question about the class content that they don't understand and sharing this with study group members, creating a crib sheet that can be used to study for the next exam, or working together to answer the questions on a sample exam. Structured tasks help the students stay focused and remain on task.

❖ **Consider the use of virtual study groups** - If circumstances prevent students from meeting on campus, consider the use of virtual study groups. This may be possible through the school's learning management system or through services such as [Rcampus](#) or [StudyRoom](#) which, at no cost, provide students with opportunities for online communication and collaboration and organization of content. Google Groups can also be used for this purpose.

TIPS FOR SETTING UP AND MANAGING STUDY GROUPS

- ❖ Groups should be small, perhaps no more than 5 to 6 people.
- ❖ If possible, try to identify people with different strengths so that the group works well as a whole.
- ❖ Appoint a team leader who can organize the sessions and a taskmaster who can keep your group focused.
- ❖ Set up the ground rules before the first meeting. Establish when and where you will meet and commit to an hour-long session each time you meet.
- ❖ Each member must read and review the course content before the group meets. It is very helpful to write down points that are unclear or questions you would like to discuss with the group.
- ❖ Stay focused on what you want to accomplish and manage your time carefully.

